NCA
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EGYPT'S POLITICAL GROWTH

ANNCR:

THE EMERGENCE OF RIVAL POLITICAL GROUPS WITHIN THE ARAB SOCIALIST UNION OF EGYPT HAS ATTRACTED WIDESPREAD INTEREST IN CAIRO. DOUGLAS ROBERTS SENT THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM THE EGYPTIAN CAPITAL.

VOICE:

POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION IN EGYPT STEMS FROM WHAT IS KNOWN HERE AS "THE CORRECTIVE MOVEMENT" LAUNCHED BY PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT FIVE YEARS AGO TO RESTORE DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS. MANY POLITICAL PRISONERS WERE RELEASED, A FREE PRESS WAS RE-INSTITUTED, AND CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AND LEADING OFFICIALS -- INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT -- WAS AUTHORIZED.

BUT A LEADING MEMBER OF EGYPT'S ONLY POLITICAL ORGANIZATION, THE ARAB SOCIALIST UNION, OR A.S.U., SAYS THAT AT FIRST IT FAILED TO RESPOND TO THE NEW ATMOSPHERE. MOHAMMED ABOU WAFIA, A MEMBER OF THE A.S.U. CENTRAL COMMITTEE, SAID THE ORGANIZATION LAGGED FAR BEHIND IN EFFORTS TO PROMOTE FREE EXPRESSION IN A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM.

THEN, LAST AUTUMN, WITH THE AGREEMENT OF PRESIDENT SADAT, MISTER ABOU WAFIA ANNOUNCED THE CREATION OF A POLITICAL FORUM TO PROMOTE THE VIEWS OF ONE FACTION OF THE A.S.U. IN EGYPT'S PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY. OTHER FORUMS WERE QUICKLY ESTABLISHED. AND BY LATE LAST YEAR, THERE WERE MORE THAN FORTY IN THE THREE-HUNDRED-AND-SIXTY-MEMBER ASSEMBLY. HOWEVER, IN A V.O.A. INTERVIEW, MISTER ABOU WAFIA SAID THE LARGE NUMBER OF FORUMS PROVED INEFFECTIVE, AND AFTER MONTHS OF DISCUSSION, HE SAID, IT WAS

DECIDED TO LIMIT THE NUMBER TO THREE. MISTER ABOU WAFIA IS NOW THE SECRETARY OF THE ARAB SOCIALIST ORGANIZATION OF EGYPT, A CENTRIST GROUP LED BY PREMIER MAMDUH SALEM. THE OTHER TWO FACTIONS ARE KNOWN AS THE PROGRESSIVE NATIONALISTS, LED BY KHALED MOHIEDDINE, A LEFTIST; AND THE SOCIALIST LIBERALS OF KAMEL MOURAD, WHO CALLS HIMSELF A MODERATE.

ALL THREE GROUPS HAVE UNVEILED POLITICAL PLATFORMS IN A BID TO WIN VOTES DURING LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR NEXT OCTOBER. MISTER MOURAD, HEAD OF THE SOCIALIST LIBERAL FACTION, BELIEVES IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO GAUGE THE SUPPORT OF THE RIVAL GRGUPS AMONG EGYPTIAN VOTERS. BUT HE BELIEVES HIS FACTION WILL WIN A MAJORITY. IN A V.O.A. INTERVIEW, MISTER MOURAD SAID THE FORUMS WILL PROBABLY LEAD TO POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE NEAR FUTURE. "WHAT IS IMPORTANT," HE SAID, "IS THAT EGYPT HAS BEGUN TO PRACTICE DEMOCRACY."

PRESIDENT SADAT HAS SAID HE HAS NO OBJECTIONS TO THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES HERE, AS LONG AS THERE IS CONTINUED AGREEMENT ON CERTAIN BASIC GOALS -- PRESUMABLY A REFERENCE TO EGYPTIAN EFFORTS TO RECOVER ISRAELI-OCCUPIED TERRITORY. MISTER ABOU WAFIA OF THE CENTRIST FACTION BELIEVES THAT THE ARAB SOCIALIST UNION, THE SOLE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION SINCE NINETEEN SIXTY-TWO, MAY EVENTUALLY DISAPPEAR. HE IS CONVINCED OF THE NEED TO ESTABLISH FULL SCALE POLITICAL PARTIES HERE, BUT HE ADVOCATES A GRADUAL APPROACH. HE ALSO BELIEVES THAT THE POLITICAL FACTION THAT WINS THE MOST VOTES IN THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS WILL HAVE A GREATER SAY IN THE FORMULATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICY. HE SAID THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY IS NOT MERELY A RUBBER STAMP FOR GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS. THE POWER OF THE

ASSEMBLY IS GROWING, HE SAID, "WE CAN AND HAVE VETOED PRESIDENTIAL DECREES, AND MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY FREQUENTLY CALL IN GOVERNMENT MINISTERS TO CRITICIZE POLICY AND PROGRAMS."

MISTER ABOU WAFIA SAID EGYPT WANTS TO CORRECT WHAT HE CALLED ITS POOR REPUTATION OF THE NINETEEN SIXTIES. "WE WANT THE WORLD TO KNOW," HE SAID, "THAT DEMOCRACY IS GROWING HERE."

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